

## **Listing of Claims**

1 – 73. (Cancelled)

74. (Currently Amended) A gaming system comprising:

a plurality of gaming machines, each machine having an input interface, selectively joining a cooperative gaming environment, contributing a wager to join a cooperative game in said environment, and allocating a winning amount from winning a said cooperative game at a said gaming machine to a prize pool;

a game controller, connected to said plurality of gaming machines, and configured to:

interact with at least one of said input interfaces ~~interface of a gaming machine~~ in order to present an invitation to allow a person to accept to join a cooperative gaming environment;

receive an acceptance to join said cooperative gaming environment, said winning amount, a change of said wager, and a change of a number of said joined gaming machines in a said cooperative game of a said cooperative gaming environment ~~on said gaming system;~~

establish at least one rule for a said cooperative game that can be played by the cooperative gaming environment after the receipt of said acceptance;

interact with at least one visual display device of the gaming machine in order to present the at least one rule for the cooperative game to allow the person to accept said at least one rule prior to commencing the cooperative game;  
[[and]]

interact with the at least one input interface of the gaming machine in order to present an option to allow the person to withdraw from the cooperative

gaming group, to complete a said cooperative game that is already in progress at said participating gaming machine in response to a withdrawal of said gaming machine from said cooperative gaming environment or to a said change of wager, to record said winning amount, and to record said change, subsequent to presenting the at least one rule to the person and prior to commencing [[the]] a new said cooperative game; and

distribute said prize pool based a number of joined gaming machines and said winning amount.

75. (Previously Presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is further configured to:

determine whether there is at least a minimum number of persons joined in the cooperative gaming environment; and

allow the cooperative game to commence if it is determined that the minimum number of persons have joined the cooperative gaming environment.

76. (Previously Presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is configured such that establishing the at least one rule comprises:

interacting with the at least one visual display device in order to prompt the person to provide rule information; and

establishing the at least one rule based on the rule information.

77. (Previously Presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is configured to interact with the at least one input interface in order to allow the person to specify how much the person wishes to wager during play of the cooperative game.

78. (Cancelled)

79. (Previously Presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is further configured to establish the at least one rule after allow the person to join.

80. (Previously Presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is further configured to allow a person to withdraw from the cooperative gaming environment after presenting the at least one rule.

81. (Cancelled)

82. (Previously Presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is further configured to allow changing the at least one rule.

83. (Previously Presented) The gaming system of claim 74, wherein the game controller is further configured to present another rule during the cooperative game.

84. (New) A gaming system comprising:

a control unit arranged to control play of a cooperative gaming environment;

a plurality of gaming machines linked to the control unit, each gaming machine being arranged to contribute a wager amount in order to join the cooperative gaming environment and

such that wins resulting from individual cooperative games played by gaming machines participating in the cooperative gaming environment are allocated to at least one prize pool, wherein during play of the cooperative game, the control unit is further arranged to:

(a) monitor gaming machine operation to determine a change to at least one of an amount wagered by any one of the gaming machines and a number of the gaming machines participating in the cooperative gaming environment;

(b) in response to detecting an occurrence of the change, allowing any individual games that were in progress at the time of the occurrence of the change to be completed prior to recording a credit meter status and win amount for each of the gaming machines since the last change; and

(c) determine a prize pool distribution amount for each of the participating gaming machines based on the status and win amounts recorded for the respective gaming machines since joining the cooperative gaming environment.

85. (New) The system of claim 84, wherein enhanced game play features are enabled by the control unit when a number of total credits wagered in the cooperative gaming environment reaches a predetermined threshold.

86. (New) The system of claim 84 in which the control unit includes a rules-establishing module for establishing rules of the cooperative gaming environment, the rules determining general operating conditions of the cooperative gaming environment.

87. (New) The system of claim 86 in which the rules-establishing module relies, at least in part, on player input in establishing the rules.

88. (New) The system of claim 87 in which the rules relate to requirements for new players entering the gaming environment and existing players exiting the cooperative gaming environment.

89. (New) The system of claim 86 further comprising a display arranged to display the established rules of the cooperative gaming environment.

90. (New) The system of claim 84, wherein the control unit further comprises an allocating module for allocating the individual games.

91. (New) The system of claim 90, wherein the allocating module allocates a mixture of higher volatility and lower volatility individual games such that there is an even distribution of gaming machine volatility in the cooperative gaming environment.

92. (New) The system of claim 84 in which the control unit allows players of the participating gaming machines to adopt different game play strategies so that risk is distributed between the players.

93. (New) The system of claim 84, wherein a separate prize pool is maintained for each of the participating gaming machines.

94. (New) The system of claim 93, wherein the control unit is further arranged to carry out steps (b) and (c) in response to determining a zero credit meter balance for any one of the participating gaming machines.

95. (New) A method of implementing cooperative gaming which includes:

monitoring a plurality of gaming machines linked to a control unit;

offering players playing those gaming machines an opportunity to compete in a cooperative gaming environment in which wins accumulated in individual cooperative games played by participating gaming machines are allocated to a prize pool, each gaming machine being arranged to contribute respective wager amounts in order to participate in the cooperative gaming environment;

monitoring operation of the gaming machines in order to determine a change to at least one of an amount wagered by any one of the gaming machines and a number of the gaming machines participating in the gaming environment;

in response to detecting an occurrence of the change, allowing any individual cooperative games that were in progress at the time of the occurrence of the change to be completed prior to recording a credit meter status and win amount for each of the gaming machines since the last change; and

determining a prize pool distribution amount for each of the participating gaming machines based on the status and win amounts recorded for the respective gaming machines since joining the cooperative gaming environment.

96. (New) The method of claim 95, further comprising enabling enhanced game play features when a total number of credits wagered in the cooperative gaming environment exceeds a predetermined threshold.

97. (New) The method of claim 95 which includes initiating the cooperative gaming environment by one of the system and any one of the players, the players electing, at their option, whether or not to compete in the cooperative gaming environment.

98. (New) The method of claim 95, further comprising establishing rules of the cooperative gaming environment, the rules determining general operating conditions of the cooperative gaming environment.

99. (New) The method of claim 98, which includes relying at least in part on player input in establishing the rules.

100. (New) The method of claim 95 further comprising, once the rules have been established, displaying the rules to the players.

101. (New) The method of claim 100, further comprising offering the players a further opportunity to elect whether or not to continue in the cooperative gaming environment.

102. (New) The method of claim 95, further comprising allocating the individual games to the participating gaming machines, the allocated games including a mixture of higher volatility and lower volatility games so that there is an even distribution of gaming machine volatility in the cooperative gaming environment.